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Ex-CIA chief says intelligence needs continue despite Cold War end

WASHINGTON, Sept 15 (AFP) - Former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director William Webster said Sunday the time was not yet right to order a reduction in intelligence activities against the Soviet Union.

Interviewed on NBC-TV's "Meet the Press," Webster said Moscow was less a military threat now but that political instability in the Soviet Union was a potential concern.

"There are different kinds of threats. I think the Soviet Union has over time lowered its threat as a military opponent. ... But the instability that is taking place in the Soviet Union could be a threat to our national security if things go wrong," Webster said.

He dismissed suggestions that the CIA and Moscow's KGB could now reduce their levels of spying on each other, saying: "I think that remains to be seen." He cited FBI conclusions that KGB activities remained at the same level.

Webster, who stepped down as CIA director before confirmation of his designated successor, Robert Gates, said: "Now more than ever we need to understand some very complex changes that are rapidly occurring in the world."

He cited arms control verification as an essential intelligence-gathering activity.